

DPH Records 650 Flu Cases in One Week; Fourth Flu Death Reported

DOVER – The number of laboratory-confirmed flu cases in Delaware is skyrocketing and one-week totals are now surpassing the highest single-week totals from last flu season. The Division of Public Health (DPH) reports that there were 650 lab-confirmed flu cases recorded between January 21 and January 27. The highest single-week total in the 2016-2017 flu season was 571. The most recent weekly number brings the total number of flu cases to 1,950 for the 2017-2018 season. The surge in flu cases comes with additional news that a fourth person has died of flu-related complications in Delaware. An 82-year-old Sussex County man, who had several underlying health conditions, passed away last week at a local hospital. Of the four flu deaths in Delaware this season, two have been Sussex County residents and two have been New Castle County residents.



Influenza-like illness continues to increase in Delaware, and across the nation. Activity is the highest seen in the last five flu seasons. Additionally, the number of flu-related hospitalizations nationwide is the highest in a decade. In Delaware, the number of hospitalizations as of January 27 is 398, more than double last year's total of 158 for the same timeframe. With the increasing number of flu cases, DPH is reminding Delawareans that they should still seek out a flu vaccine if they have not already done so.

"Our hearts go out to the family and friends of those who have

passed away from flu-related complications,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “As long as flu viruses are still circulating, it is not too late to get a flu vaccine. It is difficult to tell when flu season will peak, but all signs indicate we are likely to continue to see elevated levels of flu activity for weeks to come.”

While some individual medical providers are reporting a shortage of the flu vaccine, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates there is enough available and those who need a shot may have to call a few more places to find it. Residents are urged to first contact their primary care provider for a shot, or to visit <https://vaccinefinder.org/>. Additionally, Delawareans can visit flu.delaware.gov/ or call DPH at 1-800-282-8672 for a list of Public Health Clinics within State Service Centers that are providing the vaccine.

While hospitalizations are hitting the elderly particularly hard, infants and children have been most heavily affected by the recent surge in Delaware flu cases in general. Infants and children ages birth to 4 years old account for 277 of the season’s cases. Combined with children ages 5 to 9 years (221 cases), they make up one-quarter of this season’s flu cases. Children of elementary and middle school ages (5 to 13 years) account for 376 of the season’s cases. When those of high school age are added in, the overall number of school-age children affected by the flu this season rises to 400.

DPH has been contacted by schools concerned about large numbers of student absences due to widespread flu activity. The Division is preparing a letter with recommendations on how to prevent and reduce the spread of the influenza virus that will be sent to schools and child care centers throughout the state.

Individuals who develop influenza-like-illness symptoms are encouraged to contact their primary care provider (PCP) for treatment recommendations, or visit a walk-in care center if

you do not have a PCP, instead of going to the emergency room unless you are extremely ill with symptoms such as trouble breathing, bluish skin color, fever with a rash, dizziness or severe or persistent vomiting. Your primary care provider may decide to provide antiviral medications to help speed up recovery and prevent serious complications without an in-office visit. DPH asks medical providers to begin antiviral treatment for all hospitalized patients and all high-risk patients with suspected influenza.

In addition to getting a flu vaccine and taking antivirals, you can prevent the spread of flu germs by:

- Washing your hands frequently with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizers;
- Covering sneezes and coughs with a tissue, and disposing of tissues immediately; if no tissue is available sneezing or coughing into your inner elbow;
- Practicing social distancing.

Social distancing means that those sick with the flu should stay home from work, school, and other gatherings, and not return until they have been free of fever – with a temperature less than 100 degrees F (37.8 degrees C) without the use of fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours. They should avoid close contact with well people in the household, and stay well-hydrated by drinking plenty of water and other clear liquids.

For more information about flu surveillance in Delaware, read the weekly flu report at dhss.delaware.gov/dph/epi/influenzawkly.html.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's

spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.